



Frequently Asked Questions



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Overview

What is the FBI?

The FBI is a threat-based, intelligence-driven national security organization—the principal investigative arm of the U.S. Department of Justice and a full member of the U.S. Intelligence Community. It has the authority and responsibility to investigate specific crimes assigned to it and to provide other law enforcement agencies with cooperative services, such as fingerprint identification, laboratory examinations, and training. The FBI also gathers, shares, and analyzes intelligence—both to support its own investigations and those of its partners and to better understand and combat the security threats facing the United States.

What is the mission of the FBI?

The mission of the FBI is to protect and defend the United States against terrorist and foreign intelligence threats, to uphold and enforce the criminal laws of the United States, and to provide leadership and criminal justice services to federal, state, municipal, and international agencies and partners. It performs these responsibilities in a way that is responsive to the needs of the public and faithful to the Constitution of the United States.

What does the FBI stand for?

The FBI stands for Federal Bureau of Investigation. "Federal" refers to the national government of the United States; "Bureau" is another word for department or division of government; "Investigation" is what we do—gathering facts and evidence to solve and prevent crimes.

When was the FBI founded?

On July 26, 1908, Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte appointed an unnamed force of special agents to be the investigative force of the Department of Justice. The FBI evolved from this small group. See our [History website](#) for more information.

Who is the head of the FBI?

The FBI is led by a Director, who is appointed by the U.S. President and confirmed by the Senate for a term not to exceed 10 years. The current Director is Robert S. Mueller, III. You can find information on all Directors who have served the FBI on our [History website](#).

How is the FBI organized?

The FBI is headquartered in Washington D.C. The offices and divisions at FBI Headquarters provide direction and support to 56 field offices in big cities, approximately 400 smaller offices known as resident agencies, several specialized field installations, and more than 60 liaison offices in other countries known as legal attachés.

How many people work for the FBI?

On May 2, 2011, a total of 35,437 people worked for the FBI, including 13,963 special agents and 21,474 professional staff. Among our employees are 15,318 women, 8,594 minorities, and 1,260 persons with disabilities.

Is the FBI a type of national police force?

No. The FBI is a national security organization that works closely with many partners around the country and across the globe to address the most serious security threats facing this nation. We are one of many federal agencies with law enforcement responsibilities.

How accurately is the FBI portrayed in books, television shows, and motion pictures?

Any author, television script writer, or producer may consult with the FBI about closed cases or our operations, services, or history. However, there is no requirement that they do so, and the FBI does not edit or approve their work. Some authors, television programs, or motion picture producers offer reasonably accurate presentations of our responsibilities, investigations, and procedures in their story lines, while others present their own interpretations or introduce fictional events, persons, or places for dramatic effect. [Learn more about working with the FBI.](#)

FBI Investigations

What are the primary investigative functions of the FBI?

The FBI's investigative authority is the broadest of all federal law enforcement agencies. The FBI has divided its investigations into a number of programs, such as domestic and international terrorism, foreign counterintelligence, cyber, public corruption, civil rights, organized crime/drugs, white-collar crime, violent crimes and major offenders, and applicant matters. The FBI's investigative philosophy emphasizes close relations and information sharing with other federal, state, local, and international law enforcement and intelligence agencies. A significant number of FBI investigations are conducted in concert with other law enforcement agencies or as part of joint task forces.

Where is the FBI's authority written down?

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